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United Nations reform: measures and proposals

Time limits of new initiatives ("sunset" provisions)

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

1. This note provides the General Assembly with additional information in response to questions and comments by delegations in the open-ended informal consultations of the plenary on agenda item 157, on the subject of "Time limits of new initiatives (sunset provisions)" (A/52/851).

2. With the aim of contributing to the ongoing efforts to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of General Assembly mandates, the Secretary-General has recommended that new mandates creating new organizational structures and/or requiring major commitments of funds be subject to specific time limits. When the limits are reached, an explicit reaffirmation by the General Assembly would be required for the mandates to remain in effect. Adoption of this provision would strengthen the General Assembly's oversight and review functions.

3. The implementation of time limits is entirely consistent with all existing regulations and rules and would require neither an amendment of any such regulations and rules nor the establishment of new ones.

4. The proposed time limits are intended to apply not to the Organization's objectives but to programmatic activities and the organizational structures established to achieve those objectives.

5. The Secretary-General's proposal is intended to be prospective. Accordingly, the term "new", as in "new mandate", denotes a mandate established for the first time. Thus, the future modification of an existing mandate, no matter how extensive, would not make it "new".

6. By "organizational structures" the Secretary-General means any unit that is established in connection with a legislated mandate. The term "major" commitment of funds can be

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defined at any level that the General Assembly chooses; it could, for example, be operationalized as US$ 1 million per annum or above.

7. The specific time limit would be determined by the General Assembly at the outset, in accordance with its normal methods of taking decisions, and could vary in duration depending upon the characteristics of the task at hand.

8. The Secretary-General's proposal for time limits would be implemented by means of existing procedures and working methods. The General Assembly would continue to set programme priorities in the medium-term plan, on advice from the Committee for Programme and Coordination. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions would continue to consider the medium-term plan in accordance with its terms of reference. The Fifth Committee would continue to advise the Assembly on all budgetary matters. The Assembly, in its review of mandates prior to taking a decision regarding their possible renewal, may wish to consider also drawing on the expertise of other relevant legislative bodies, as appropriate, in accordance with existing procedures.

9. Instituting time limits need not affect the duration of staff contracts. Such limits may make it necessary periodically to redeploy individual staff members to related or new tasks, as is provided for under current personnel policy (for example, staff regulation 1.2). The periodic retraining and rotation of staff are, in any case, desirable objectives in their own right.

10. A hypothetical illustration of how time limits would work is described in the scenarios below. In this illustration, the General Assembly decides to establish a programme to detect near-earth asteroids. It approves six posts and appropriates $1.2 million for 1999. The programme would be established through the adoption of a resolution by the Assembly. Prior to the adoption of the resolution, the Assembly would consider the related statement of programme budget implications as required by rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and the procedures outlined in General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986 on the review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations.

11. The scenarios show the process whereby a programme of a specified duration – five years in this example – would be established and funded and would come to an end or would be renewed. One scenario deals with a programme established at the beginning of a biennium, and the other with a programme established in an odd-numbered year.

12. A review of the programme would be undertaken during the same year as the General Assembly considers the proposed outline for the programme budget for the next biennium. This would enable the Assembly, when it takes a decision on the budget outline, to determine whether it should make provisions for the continuation of the programme beyond the time limit originally envisaged.

Hypothetical time-limited mandates

A. Assuming the decision to create a new programme is taken in an even-numbered year

Biennium 1998–1999		*Biennium 2000–2001*		*Biennium 2002–2003*	
1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
December: 1. General Assembly establishes a Programme for the detection of near-earth asteroids. 2. General Assembly approves six posts and appropriates $1.2 million for 1999. 3. General Assembly notes that Programme will come to an end in December 2003 unless Assembly decides otherwise.	*April*: Secretary-General includes provision for Programme in proposed programme budget for 2000–2001.		*April*: Secretary-General includes in proposed programme budget for 2002–2003 provision for Programme with an indication that, under the time limit, Programme will come to an end on 31 December 2003.	*August*: 1. Secretary-General, when preparing budget outline for 2004–2005, recalls that Programme is due to expire unless extended by General Assembly beyond December 2003. *December*: 2. General Assembly reviews implementation of the Programme and, when taking a decision on budget outline, decides whether Programme should continue beyond 2003.	(A) If General Assembly decides that Programme should continue, *April*: Secretary-General includes provision for Programme in proposed programme budget for 2004–2005; (B) If General Assembly takes no decision on continuation of Programme, *December*: Programme comes to an end.

B. Assuming the decision to create a new programme is taken in an odd-numbered year

Biennium 1998–1999	*Biennium 2000–2001*		*Biennium 2002–2003*		*Biennium 2004–2005*
1999	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
December: 1. General Assembly establishes a Programme for promotion of civility among urban dwellers. 2. General Assembly approves six posts and appropriates $2.4 million for 2000–2001. 3. General Assembly notes that Programme will come to an end in December 2004 unless Assembly decides otherwise.		*April*: Secretary-General includes provision for Programme in proposed programme budget for 2002–2003.	*August*: 1. Secretary-General, when preparing budget outline for 2004–2005, recalls that Programme is due to expire unless extended by General Assembly beyond 2004. 2. General Assembly reviews implementation of the Programme and, when taking a decision on the outline, decides whether Programme should continue beyond 2004.	*April*: Secretary-General includes in proposed programme budget for 2004–2005 provision for Programme for the year 2004 only or if the General Assembly decides that Programme should continue, provision is included for 2004-2005.	*December*: Programme comes to an end unless General Assembly has decided that Programme should continue.

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